The Seed Sower.

A Magazine for the Church, the School, and the Home.

EDITORS: L. P. JACKS, M.A., AND JOSEPH WOOD.

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The Angel in the Worm.

My little maiden of four years old—
No myth, but a genuine child is she,
With her bronze-brown eyes, and her curls of gold—
Came, quite in disgust, one day to me.

Rubbing her shoulder with rosy palm,
As the loathsome touch seemed yet to thrill her,
She cried, "O mother! I found on my arm
A horrible crawling caterpillar!"

And with mischievous smile she could scarcely smother,
Yet a glance, in its daring, half-awed and shy,
She added, "While they were about it, mother,
I wish they'd just finished the butterfly!"

They were words to the thought of the soul that turns
From the coarser form of a partial growth,
Reproaching the infinite patience that yearns
With an unknown glory to crown them both.

Ah, look thou largely, with lenient eyes,
On whatso beside thee may creep and cling,
For the possible beauty that underlies
The passing phase of the meanest thing!

What if God's great angels, whose waiting love
Beholdeth our pitiful life below,
From the holy height of their heaven above,
Couldn't bear with the worm till the wings should grow.

MRS. A. D. T. WHITNEY.

The Worm.

Thou see'st me, the meanest thing, and so I am indeed;
My bosom of itself is cold, and of itself is dark:
But he that loves the lowly pours his oil upon my head,
And kisses me, and binds His nuptial bonds around my breast.

WILLIAM BLAKE.

The Pathway of Love:

A SERMON,

BY THE REV. FRANK WALTERS.

"Behold a ladder set up on earth, and the top of it reached to heaven."—GENESIS xxviii. 12.

There is a Scandinavian poem which tells us of two passionate lovers who were wrenched apart in sorrow and despair, and for the rest of life lived in separation. Their only hope was that death would at last end their misery, and unite them in an eternal heaven. But alas! death only translated them to two separate realms. Afar off they saw each other; across unmeasured ways of splendour, across a myriad worlds that spread and glowed and burned, they gazed with unutterable longing and awful love. At last, in passionate resolution, each began to build a bridge of light across the abyss, to unite their separate worlds.

A thousand years they built, still on, with faith,
Immeasurable, quenchless, so my legend saith,
Until a wondrous arch of light—a bridge
Above Heaven's highest vault swung clear, remotest ridge from ridge.

Fear seized the Cherubim, to God they spake:
See! what amongst thy works, Almighty, these can make!
God smiled, and smiling lit the spheres with joy—
What in my world love builds (he said) *shall I, shall Love itself destroy?*

That is the legend of the Pathway of Love. The energy of a pure love is the power of God within the soul. Love is omnipotent, and endows finite weakness with infinite strength. Whatsoever is wrought in love is wrought in God. Love is the vicegerent of God, to whom are given the keys of the kingdom of heaven, with the promise: "Whatsoever thou shalt bind on earth shall be bound in heaven, and whatsoever thou shalt loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven."

I. Love builds the pathway to God. If the finest thing you can say of the divine nature is that God is Love, then only along the ascending ladder of human affection can you rise to God. When I think of God, my mind is often baffled by inscrutable mysteries and awful problems. They tell me that God is an inscrutable being, dwelling in light inaccessible. But though the word *God* may only suggest what is distant and mysterious, the word *Love* calls up the most intimate and sacred experiences. Here, then, through the heart of man, we find an open way to God. The various affections of our nature, transfigured, purified, perfected, are the ascending pathway which leads to God. The bible teaches this over and over again. The bible uses the most passionate language of the heart to emphasise the character of God, and out of the strength of human love builds the bridge of light, whereby we find ourselves in the presence of an Eternal Father. There is scarcely a relationship of man or woman which is not used in the bible to reveal the divine nature. "Like as a *father* pitieth his children, so the Lord pitieth them that fear him." "Can a *woman* forget her sucking child, that she should not have compassion on the son of her womb? Yea, she may forget; yet will I not forget thee." As one whom his *mother* comforteth, so will I comfort you." "Thy Maker is thy *husband*, the Lord of Hosts is his name." Yes! if God is Love, then by ascending this wondrous ladder of sublime affections, you can reach the very heart of God.

II. Love is the pathway to power. Many of our lives are weak and wasted; they are lives of drudgery and toil, because we have never been inspired by an over-mastering affection. Over that abyss of separation and difficulty you can see the shining ideal which you worship from afar. But you only worship it, admire it, and think how far off it is; you despair of uniting its purity and beauty with your daily life. But if your worship was a passionate love and a resistless longing, the abyss would soon be bridged. The apostle cried: "I can do all things, through Christ which strengtheneth me." Christianity, at first, was a passionate love to Christ; that was the secret of the power by which it subdued the world. Your strength is proportionate to your love; and if your love is a divine power, then it shall clothe your mortal weakness in immortal strength. The revival hymn says:—

> Faith, mighty faith, the promise sees,
> And looks to that alone,
> Laughs at impossibilities,
> And cries: It shall be done.

I know this, that love often laughs at impossibilities, and accomplishes miracles of power. For love is under a compulsion to express itself. It was by a divine necessity that the two lovers were constrained to build the bridge from the distant worlds. They did not think about it, arrange it, or plan it,—but love created it. That is the difference between talent and genius. Talent says: "I think I will." Genius says: "I must; necessity is laid upon me." You can instantly detect the work that is wrought in love. Everything done out of a resistless love bears the mark of necessity, of inevitableness. Would you learn your power?—then learn to love. Would you test the purity of your love?—ask yourself if it nerves you for duty, and strengthens you for noble enterprise. Love in its highest reaches, means inspiration and genius; until, like the great God, the soul becomes the creator of new worlds of power and beauty.

III. Love is the pathway to power over other souls. Nothing can lead you into the sanctuary of another soul, except the pathway of love. For there is such a thing as spiritual separation. You may share the same house with one from whom spiritually you are separated by a great gulf. "Strangers yet," says the song; after years of friendship, and even of married life, still the souls have never touched; they are strangers yet! And nothing can bridge that gulf except the inspiration of a strong affection.

Very often two such souls are suddenly surprised to find the depth of love which has been latent, and which might have blessed and glorified their lives. And welcome the grief, hallowed

the sorrow which thus disciplines souls into a perfect fellowship! How touchingly Tennyson teaches this in his little poem—

As through the land at eve we went
And plucked the ripened ears,
We fell out, my wife and I,
O we fell out I know not why,
And kissed again with tears.

For when we came where lies the child
We lost in other years,
There above the little grave,
O there above the little grave,
We kissed again with tears.

That little grave was the pathway of love, across which the divided souls were bound again together.

IV. And is not love the pathway from Hell to Heaven? "He descended into Hell!" And not only the Christian Saviour, but many brave men and heroic women, under the passion of a great love, have gone down into hells of sin and misery to seek and save the lost. Many a ransomed sinner can chant the song of redeeming love. Not all the sin of the human heart can for ever withstand the po ver of a love which can never be exhausted. That is what makes us believe in a glorious optimism. Sin will have to change, because divine love never changes. Love is the strongest force in the world, and its victories must surpass all the achievements of law and penalty. Love has not yet had fair chance and full scope. If a teacher begins to despair of one of his scholars, you say: "But have you tried love?" And when men despair of the world, I say: "Do not give the world up till love has been tried; wait until love ascends the throne and rules the kingdoms of the world." People go on sinning, because they don't know how much they are loved. We know that human love can work miracles of salvation; and divine love must have power to abolish all the hells, and work out a complete and universal redemption. Human love, with its saving energy, is the prophecy of the final triumph of eternal goodness over misery and sin.

V. And is it not love which builds the pathway from this world, across the abyss of death, into that immortal world, where all the departed live in God? Immortality is the prophesy of the heart. The wonderful thing is the belief itself; how man has guessed the mighty secret; how in face of the most terrible facts he should yet hold on so bravely by this unconquerable hope. The understanding can tell you nothing of immortality; no logic can prove it; no miracle can attest it; no supernatural revelation can support so stupendous a doctrine. The faith of immortality is so strong, because it is based on the strength of love. Only the infinite demands of human love can corroborate our finest faith and grandest hope. As long as love abides, this radiant hope will abide, shining for ever above the storms of time and the ruins of mortality. It is love which rears the pillars of heaven, and constructs the glories of the celestial city. Immortality means the persistence of love beyond the physical shock of death. Of the beloved ones taken from our side, we say that we cannot make them dead; our love endows them with an endless life; and immortality is the pathway across the separating gulf. The poet tells us of the young wife who died as she was leaving the marriage altar. For twenty years she had to wait in heaven till her bridegroom joined her. And there she lingered at the gate, refusing to share the glories or join in the hallelujahs, watching the long procession of souls who passed within; and often turning away to weep that she was in heaven while her husband was left on earth. Yes, they tell us about the golden streets, the sea of glass, and the gates of pearl; but, we prefer this dear old familiar world to such a heaven, unless love be there as well. The humblest cottage on earth, sanctified by affection, is better than the New Jerusalem, unless it be A HOME—a home of beautiful relationship and sacred service. And so there comes the prophecy of the heart, which sounds like the sure promise of our God:—"Let not your hearts be troubled; in the Father's house of many mansions love shall be made perfect, earthly affection shall reach its consummation, and heaven shall be the final triumph of eternal goodness over all created souls."

The door to any outward heaven lies through an inward heaven.—*James Freeman Clarke.*

One life rolls uninterruptedly an endless circulation through all men.—*R. W. Emerson.*

The God whom I worship is a God who sees and hears and thinks and loves and pities and approves.—*F. H. Hedge.*

Three Parables from Ruskin.

III.

A Parable of Precious Stones.

Did you ever notice that the most beautiful and the most important things in all the world are the commonplace things. How commonplace are the things we can do least well without. If it came to the pinch we could do without roses and daffodils, without tulips and geraniums, but we could not do without the green grass. A world without grass would be a desolate world indeed. We think there is nothing so common, nor is there. It springs up everywhere; we hasten to get rid of it from our gravel walks and flower beds, but what would England be without its lawns and meadow? What would Switzerland be without its green valleys to set off its white peaks? Half the beauty of landscape painting is in getting the grass right. What beauty there is in this commonplace thing!

Or take the stones of the earth. We could spare the marble if need be. We could get on well enough without the jasper and amethyst. But we could not do one moment without the dull-looking ironstone which covers the earth with the loveliest tints, supplies us with a thousand tools, and nourishes in health the blood coursing through our veins.

What is it makes up the beauty of the world? Commonplace things—the common blue overhead, the common green, grey, and purple of the waters, the common shimmer of the sunshine, the common grasses that are trampled down in every field, the common dust of the wayside we trample beneath our feet.

And the difference between a man of genius and a dull, ordinary man is that the one has his eye open to see the beautiful in common things which to the other are common only. One sees the common bush aflame with God where the other just picks blackberries.

Here is a block of white marble. To you and to me it is only a stone of a certain size and weight, worth so much in the market for chimney pieces. But the artist sees within this massive stone a beautiful thing, and carves it for men, and it becomes a living thing to him and through him to us—a thing not of this world but of the invisible world. It lives for us and we love it. For the story of Pygmalion is more then a dream.

Turn the thought round. Beautiful things are made out of the cheapest and commonest materials. When you examine the wonder of the sunset, what is it? Commonplace light playing with commonplace mist. If it were near and enveloped you, you would call it a fog and think it very uncomfortable and disagreeable. And it is fog transfigured by the slanting rays that make the magnificence of that "sunset couch at even."

Here is a handful of precious stones. How beautiful they are with their varied colours flashing in the light. What are they made of? Commonplace sand, earth, lime, and charcoal. Let us listen to John Ruskin on this point:—

"We can hardly arrive at a more absolute type of impurity than the mud or slime of a damp over-trodden path in the outskirts of a manufacturing town. I do not say mud of the road, because it is mixed with animal refuse; but take merely an ounce or two of the blackest slime of a beaten footpath, on a rainy day, near a manufacturing town. That slime we shall find in most cases composed of clay (or brick dust, which is burnt clay), mixed with soot, a little sand, and water. All these elements are at helpless war with each other, and destroy reciprocally each other's nature and power: competing and fighting for place at every tread of your foot; sand squeezing out clay, and clay squeezing out water, and soot meddling everywhere and defiling the whole. Let us suppose an ounce of mud is left in perfect rest, and that its elements gather together, like to like, so that their atoms may get into the closest relations possible. Let the clay begin. Ridding itself of all foreign substance, it gradually becomes a white earth, already very beautiful, and fit, with the help of congealing fire, to be made into finest porcelain and painted on, and be kept in kings' palaces. But such artificial consistence is not its best. Leave it still quiet, to follow its own instinct of unity, and it becomes not only white, but clear; not only clear, but hard, not only clear and hard, but so that it can deal with light in a wonderful way, and gather out of it the loveliest blue rays only, refusing the rest. We call it then a sapphire. Such being the consummation of the

clay, we give similar permission of quiet to the sand. It also becomes white, a white earth; then proceeds to grow clear and hard, and at last arranges itself in mysterious infinitely fine parallel lines, which have the power of reflecting, not merely the blue rays, but the green, purple, and red rays, in the greatest beauty in which they can be seen through any hard material whatsoever. We call it then an opal. In next order the soot sets to work. It cannot make itself white at first; but instead of being discouraged, tries harder and harder, and comes out clear at last; and the hardest thing in the world; and for the blackness that it had, obtains in exchange the power of reflecting all the rays of the sun at once, in the vividest blaze that any solid thing can shoot. We call it then a diamond. Last of all the water purifies or unites itself, contented enough if it only reach the form of a dew-drop; but, if we insist on its proceeding to a more perfect consistence, it crystallises into the shape of a star. And for the ounce of slime which we had for the political economy of competition, we have, by political economy of co-operation, a sapphire, an opal, and a diamond, set in the midst of a star of snow."

Which things are a parable for human souls, of what indeed some of them are—as the slime trodden under foot of their fellows—but truer still of what they have it in them to become, precious stones for the adornment of heaven. Look at the degradation of some soddened path in the black country and then remember that the materials for precious stones are all there, and that by right treatment they might be made to yield a sapphire, an opal, a diamond. Then consider the fallen in human life, the low, the ignorant, the vice-defeatured and vice-deformed, those who are of the dust and off-scouring of the generations of men, and think how this human clay, now trampled and despised, may yet be knit into strength and beauty by right treatment. Pick up one of the match-girls of our streets, already befouled in thought and feeling if not actually the prey of vicious lusts; take by the hand one of these soiled children of the street—a phenomenon which might break the heart of a God to behold!—a human soul early bespattered and dragged in the mire, so soiled and starved that you shudder to see one of your own children touch her. Speak to her, and it seems at first sight that such a creature is only fit for the dunghill. But look closer, for there too, are the germs and powers of a sweet human life, out of the slime may come a pearl for God's vesture. That degraded soul is in union with God, has in it something akin to God, is loved by God, must be brought back to God. This was what Jesus Christ taught in the parable of the *one* lost sheep, and the lost piece of silver. It is the teaching of John Ruskin in his parable of precious stones.

Joseph Wood.

Historic Notes on Midland Churches.

No. X.—Part II.

ALCESTER—Old Meeting House.

Alcester is probably the last place where Lindsey's original liturgy, Apostles' Creed, and all were read; and that, as recently as 1863, by the Rev. Thomas Warren, who resigned about Midsummer in the following year, and died 25th August, 1874. The magnificently bound quarto copy of the prayer book which Warren always used is now before me. In it he has written in large hand on a card that would be more legible, a copy of the Apostles' Creed. He omits the phrase *He descended into hell* and substitutes for it *He rested in the grave*; and, instead of *The holy Catholic Church* has *holy Christian Church*. The card and the pages of the liturgy are well thumbed, and show signs of constant use. He has also inserted written copies of "A prayer of supplication to Almighty God, appointed to be read for the mitigation and removal of cholera," and of "A prayer for the Mutiny in India, to be read before the general thanksgiving." The first ends with the words "all which we ask in the name and mediation of Jesus Christ our Lord;" the second "to the glory of Thy great name, the prosperity of Thy holy word, and the advancement of the spiritual and peaceful kingdom of Thy beloved Son, our Savour Jesus Christ." Warren usually wore the surplice, and was a man of means, which he generously devoted to the welfare of his chapel and its worshippers. The present pulpit Bible was his gift, and bears his book-plate with motto *Fides et constantia*. One of his old scholars tells me how he used to teach them whole chapters of S. Luke's and S. John's

Gospels, which they had to say frequently to Mr. Warren when he visited his Sunday school, where he often had some forty boys and as many girls. He began the "Register of Christenings at Alcester, Old Presbyterian Meeting," the first entry bearing date 9th July, 1837. During the earlier part of Warren's ministry there lived at Alcester "the Rev. John Hancock, who was for many years engaged in tuition, and occasionally in the ministry at this place" (C. Ref. 1842 p. 320). Two of Mr. Hancock's aged daughters still live in Alcester; from them, through Mr. Dale, I learn that their father, who died there on 6th March, 1842, "was minister at the Old Meeting for a period of 21 years; he was educated at Mr. Aspland's Academy, at Hackney, but his health failing, he was obliged to leave before he had passed through the full curriculum. It was shortly after this that he began to conduct the services at the Old Meeting, and this he continued to do until Mr. Warren came, to whom he was for a little while assistant." The late Mr. Herbert New, in his address delivered in the chapel at its re-opening on 13th July, 1893, said that after Benjamin Morris "came a lay minister named Hancock, and a minute in the chapel books, dated about 1819, stated that the Rev. Timothy Davis was thanked for coming over from Evesham to conduct evening services, which he did for some time." From this and the wording of his obituary notice, as above, I fancy Mr. Hancock was never the appointed minister of the chapel, but that he gave it many years of occasional assistance. Mr. New dates Mr. Warren's settlement about 1834.

On 17th July, 1864, the chapel was re-opened under new management by the Rev. John Gordon. From that date until 13th March, 1870, the vestry book records a regular weekly service by many ministers, who signed the entries and gave their texts. These preachers included Sam. Bache, Chas. F. Biss, John Birks, Wm. Cochrane, Robert H. Cotton, John Cuckson, David Davis, John Dean, H. Enfield Dowson, R. B. Drummond, M. Gibson, John Gordon, Wm. H. Herford, Joseph Heywood, Leonard Hünges, J. Kedwards, Edw. Myers, D. Maginnis, and Benj. Wright.

During Mr. Eastlake's ministry the morning congregation averaged 24 and the evening 45. The old school building owned by the congregation was repaired, and the Sunday school and night classes held there.

After Mr. Scott's ministry, services were again conducted by supplies; from 1877 to 1882, Mr. Henry Watton, a layman, rendered much help, and in 1882 the chapel was again closed.

After its re-opening in 1893, the Rev. Rudolf Davis, B.A., conducted service on Sunday evenings, and on the 9th September in that year the regular ministry of the Rev. John Dale began here. A year later this interesting chapel was lighted with gas for the first time in its history, and the candles became only a memory.

The vestry still retains its six carved oak chairs, "Cromwell" table, wooden tuning whistle, and two pewter plates.

No communion plate belonging to the congregation was ever heard of by Mr. New, who told me in 1891 that "Mr. Warren used to bring his own plate for the service."

The original register of births, baptisms, and deaths from 1774 to 1836 was deposited with the Registrar-General by Mr. Warren, and is now in Somerset House, London.

References.

Monthly Repostory	...	1823	p. 159
Christian Reformer	...	1840	p. 344
Ditto ditto	...	1861	p. 279
Inquirer ...	...	1893	22nd July
Private papers	...	*penes me*	

GEORGE EYRE EVANS,
Dodington Parsonage,
Whitchurch, in Salop.

(Next month. Bewdley—High Street Chapel.)

The Soul's Message.

O silent, silent, silent soul of mine,
What would'st thou say if thou could'st clearly speak,
Could'st clothe in language I can understand
The thoughts that passion in thy depths for words?
Ah me! perchance, if thou should'st utter voice
Thy message were too fine, too pure of tone,
Too thrilled with all the music of the spheres,
And throbbing with the ecstasy divine
For ears grown gross through dull material sounds.
But oh! some faintest whisper let there come,
Some light breath gently steal across the mind
Life-laden from the fulness of the Soul
That maketh ours, and into it distil
The mystic guidance which, received, shall lead
Into life's Heaven—its home on earth, in God.

A. A. CHARLESWORTH.

The Parables of Jesus.

LESSON-NOTES FOR SUNDAY SCHOOL TEACHERS.

V.

THE TREASURE AND THE PEARL.

[Read Matt. xiii., 44-46; Prov. ii., 3-5; Matt. xvi., 26.]

Twin parables like twin stars. At first sight they shine with one light—*i.e.*, teach the same lessons: (1) the preciousness of the gospel; (2) the earnestness and self-sacrifice of men in securing its blessings. But looked at more closely differences appear. In the one case the "kingdom" is the hid treasure, in the other the "kingdom" is not so much the pearl as "the merchantman." Again, in the one case, the finder of the treasure comes upon it unexpectedly—is not looking for treasure—is busy ploughing, when suddenly he comes upon a great blessing. In the case of the merchantman, he is already a seeker for truth and peace, and what he seeks he finds.

EXPLANATORY, v. 44.—"*Treasure hid in a field.*—In the East, where there were no banks, and property had no security, men often made a bank of the earth. So late as 1860, a traveller in Palestine wrote: "Our dragoman acknowledged that in Egypt he had money buried, that his savings might be concealed from the rapacity of the Pasha." This was very common when men were about to travel; they buried their wealth, often entrusting no one with the secret of its deposit; hence, in the event of their death, it was often lost to their heirs. Finding a long-buried treasure is a stock incident in eastern tales, and some modern romances—"Monte Christo," "Treasure Island," etc., have the same motive. Our own proverb of "not leaving a stone unturned" has its origin in the search for hidden treasure.

"*Buyeth the field.*"—We are not required to discuss whether the man was right in buying the field without letting the owner know the treasure he had found in it. *Treasure-trove* in this country belongs to the crown, and property *found* in the street or elsewhere does not belong to the finder. The point of the parable is the man's eagerness, earnestness, determination, intensity to secure the blessing. But no parable must be perused in all its details for that would often be to press it entirely out of its meaning.

V. 45.—"*Merchantman,*" a kind of travelling jeweller.

"*Goodly pearls.*" There are pearls of an inferior quality, but this man was seeking only the best. Pearls were the costliest and most beautiful ornaments. The strongest proof that historians give of Cleopatra's extravagance was that she dissolved a pearl worth £200,000 in vinegar, and then drunk it with her wine. When a pearl was large and perfect, it had an almost incredible value. Irregularity in the shape, roughness, or a yellowish tinge were regarded as defects. It is the one jewel that does not want the lapidary's art. A fitting emblem of the perfect gospel life.

LESSONS.—1. *There is one thing needful*—one thing above all price. What is it? Answers to many names—a Christ-like character, the spiritual life, the Gospel, a true, fond, and loving heart, the grace of God, wisdom, the Kingdom of Heaven, etc. "She is more precious than rubies." Let us call it CHARACTER. More valuable than life itself. Many a man has sacrificed life rather than sacrifice honour. A Christ-like soul—a Christ-like life is man's highest good. Look at a busy city. How thronged the streets; how eager the faces; how hard the work-men hanging here and there, all intent on (?) treasure. Seeking wealth, happiness, fame, power, position. Yet all these things perish—only one thing lasts on—the man's own soul. And a man who amid all other treasures *finds his own soul* is the great finder, for that lives on. Character is immortal; a treasure for which all else must be satisfied—a pearl of great price.

2. Character demands the greatest earnestness and and intensity. All possessions require long effort, apprenticeship, infinite trouble, many sacrifices. Skill of hand in playing the violin, or drawing a tree, or shaping a tool is only acquired by incessant practice. A language is acquired, shorthand is learned, a trade is mastered by years of effort. So character is not built up in a day, nor won easily. The sacrifice of everything else may not be required, but for the sacrifice of everything else we must be prepared. Character, religion, the Christ-like soul must be our chief pursuit. There are many goodly pearls to be sought and found on earth—knowledge—friends—art—yet to do right may sometimes require their sacrifice. They have their value, but this is above all price; not to be secured without will, determination, and many a hard struggle.

VI.

THE UNMERCIFUL SERVANT.

[Read Matt. xviii., 21-35.]

In these verses there is a question about forgiveness (21-22), a parable about forgiveness (23-24), and a lesson about forgiveness (35). Remind the class of some notable instances of forgiveness—Joseph and his brethren; Christ on the cross (Luke xxiii., 34); Stephen (Acts vii., 60). Instances of unforgiveness—Shylock; Louis xii., who said, nothing smelt so sweet as the dead body of an enemy!

EXPLANATORY.—V. 21. "*Till seven times.*" The Rabbis taught the duty of forgiving *three* times and no more. This was a great advance on the old Hebrew maxim, "an eye for an eye, and a tooth for a tooth." But Peter felt it was time still further to enlarge the scope of forgiveness. He had caught something of Christ's gentle spirit. Seven times? In this question Peter stept out in advance of his age and nation.

V. 22.—"*Seventy times seven.*"—By this Jesus meant not 490 acts of forgiveness, but a forgiving spirit, which never counted at all. He meant something boundless and infinite. Here, as elsewhere, a definite is used to express an indefinite number, so that mercy, like space, has no limits.

V. 23.—"*Servants*"—not slaves—but ministers of state—probably the governer of a province, through whose hands the revenues of a province would pass on their way to the king's treasury.

V. 24.—"*Ten thousand talents.*"—We cannot say what talents are here meant—Greek, Syrian, or Hebrew—but, at the lowest standard, the man's debt would be two millions of our money. Probably Christ merely meant to indicate a debt so enormous that no debtor could ever hope to pay it.

V. 25.—"*To be sold.*"—This verse indicates some eastern land, not Palestine, as the scene of the parable. Jews were not sold for debt nor imprisoned.

V. 26.—"*Worshipped him,*" *i.e.*, gave him homage, which consisted of prostration on the ground, with the embracing and kissing of the feet.

V. 28.—"*Fellow servant*"—not of the same rank—probably a poor man.

V. 28.—"*Hundred pence*"—About £3 2s. 6d. of our money—a mere bagatelle compared with his creditors' huge debt.

V. 28.—"*Took him by the throat*"—note his harshness and cruelty as well as his unforgiving temper.

LESSONS.—1. *The generosity of God's forgiveness.* Although all the details of the parable must not be pressed, it is certain Jesus, in speaking of the King, gave an image of God and of the fulness and boundlessness of the divine mercy. God does not ask for recompense or to be paid back. In opposition to the popular doctrine of atonement God is represented as freely forgiving without calling in a mediator or asking for vicarious punishment or demanding that the debt be paid by somebody else. It is a picture of forgiveness without any condition but repentance (see also parable of Prodigal Son). In neither parable is there any question of paying the debt or of atonement. The debt is freely forgiven.

2. *That a man cannot be forgiven who does not forgive.* This servant's "heart" was quite untouched by the mercy of his Lord. The money payment was remitted, and the outward punishment was excused, but the man had still a hard heart. His Lord's forgiveness *could not* bless him, because he himself was unforgiving. He was forgiven and yet forgiveness did him no good. And so he was not forgiven. God's forgiveness is no good to a man who himself does not forgive. There is something for a man to do. The sunshine cannot enter a room unless you open the shutters; music cannot fill the soul with delight unless you take your fingers out of your ears. Forgiveness of others is like opening the shutters. Now God's forgiveness can enter; it is like unstopping the ears; now God's music of mercy can fill the soul.

Forgiveness the hardest of all Christian graces. "Blessed are the merciful, for they shall obtain mercy." [In senior classes the lesson may be enforced by reading "In a Ruined Chapel," from Olive Schreiner's "Dreams."]

VII.

THE TWO SONS.

[Read Matt. xxi., 28-32. Learn Matt. vii., 21.]

Have you ever seen the sky getting black overhead?—clouds gathering. What is coming?—a storm. As Christ's life on earth drew to a close, the storm of opposition and persecution gathered, which wrought his death. The priests and pharisees were especially angry with him, and were always plotting to entrap him into some admission which might be used against him. But he turns the tables upon them. They ask him a question (v. 23). Instead of giving a direct answer, he asks *them* a question (v. 25), which they dared not answer as they would have liked for fear of the people. He then tells them three parables, in which, as in three mirrors, they might see themselves in their true characters. Observe Christ's method. He wished to touch the consciences of these men. If he had told them at once they were hypocrites and wicked men, their prejudice and personal instinct would have led them to defend themselves. Jesus pursued a method by which they convicted themselves of wrong. The same method employed by Nathan in bringing conviction to the conscience of David (2 Sam. xii., 1-14). Jesus found the way to these men's consciences by a story. They had come to entangle him in his talk. He does his best to disentangle them from hypocrisy. They listened to his story and approved, and then awoke to the fact that these stories were directed at them (v. 45).

The parable of the two sons is extremely simple. It is the contrast between profession and practice. So far as profession went the Pharisees were all that could be desired; but their lives gave the lie to their words. On the other hand, many who had never made any profession of religion were moved by the preaching of John to repentance, and began to work the work of God.

V. 28.—"Son, go work to-day in my vineyard." Here are three things: (1) God's call is a call to "work," not simply prayer or worship, but *work—i.e.*, "*doing* the will of the Father, which is in heaven." (2) It is a call to work *now*—"to-day;" many people mean to do right to-morrow. (3) It is a call to work in a certain sphere—"my vineyard." God's vineyard is, wherever truth needs to be spoken, and wherever love can be shown.

V. 31.—"Whether of them twain did the will of his father." The emphatic word is *did*; it mattered little what they *said*. Saying without doing is like a counterfeit coin, or like a clock striking twelve, while the hands point to something else. This is the point of the parable. To say and do are very different things (Jas. ii., 15-16). People are apt to think that because they read the Bible, go to church, and wish well to religion, they are really religious; but well-wishing is not well-doing. Every day there is something to be *done*—not talked about; not assumed, but to be actually *done*. People may talk much about religion and moral virtues only to hide their want of them, or to be a cloak for positive sin. (See Mr. Pecksniff).

> And thus I clothe my naked villainy
> With old odd ends, stolen forth of Holy Writ;
> And seem a saint, when most I play the devil.
>
> SHAKESPEARE.

Jesus was never so severe as upon *hypocrisy* (Matt. xxiii., 1-4, 13, 25-28) All pretence is hateful; all cant is detestable. A hypocrite is one who acts a part—legitimately on the stage—illegitmately in actual life. The hypocrite is not what he seems to be. At last he even deceives himself, and comes to believe that he actually *is* what he has been trying to appear. It is told of a certain actor that he had so often played the part of the King in Hamlet that at last he came to believe he was a king, and strutted in private as he did on the stage. Well, we may deceive ourselves, but we cannot deceive God. He sees through the work, the words, the profession, to the heart and the life; he pays no attention to the fact that a child says his prayers in the morning, if he makes himself disagreeable at the breakfast-table;

He cares not for Sunday worship if Monday practice be bad, quarrelsome, and selfish. Nothing with God is a substitute for "doing the Father's will." Impress the lessons of Simplicity and Sincerity.

A man of words and not of deeds,
Is like a garden full of weeds.

VIII.

THE WICKED VINE-DRESSERS.

[Read Matt. xxi., 33-45; Isaiah v., 1-7.]

It may be pointed out to elder scholars how, in this parable, as in the parables of the *Great Supper* and the *Royal Wedding*, Christ proclaimed a most important truth concerning the future history of the Gospel when he taught that it would find a welcome, not among the people who might be regarded as its natural heirs—the Jews—but among the Gentile people, who had not been blessed with the advantages of Israel. God had given Israel great blessings—teachers, prophets, psalmists, heroes—but when he came seeking the fruits of righteousness, the vine was barren, and the vine-dressers ill-treated his prophets. The Great Prophet, Jesus, they treated most cruelly of all, and so the Gospel shook the dust of the Holy Land off its feet, and found a welcome and a home in the Gentile world.

For most classes, the special reference of the parable to Jews and Gentiles may be passed by, and its broad human significance brought out as a picture of lost opportunities, lost privileges, neglected duties, etc. But the teachers must not make the mistake of pressing every detail of the parable. A vivid picture is painted; its details add to the truth of the general effect, but it is the general effect—lost opportunities—that has to be considered.

Describe a vine-yard—a vine-*garden*. Yard and garden are the same word, and you can go to places in England where they call a *gate* a *yate*, and a *garden* a *yarden*. A vine is the plant the grapes (noblest fruit in the world) grow on; and *vine* is another form of the word *wine*, for wine is made of grapes, or ought to be. Vines if left alone will run up trees or houses, or will spread along the ground like a carpet. But when men want to get a great many grapes out of each vine, they do not let one plant grow to a great size, but plant a great many in rows, and train them up poles like they do the hops in Kent. These have to be kept trimmed and pruned, and prevented from growing too thick and choking one another, or running all into leaf and having no strength left for grapes; a great deal of work to do in a vineyard. Noble plants need noble culture; the work not easy; means a great deal of stopping in the hot sun; aching back; aching head. There are insects to be brushed off, and in the east there is a wall or prickly fence to be made to keep out foxes, and other animals. All the year round there is work to do in the vineyard. But the vintage season or grape harvest pays for all. Time of great rejoicing. How sad when after all the year's work there is no harvest!

V. 33.—"*Hear another parable*"—as if Jesus said to his hearers, "I have not done with you yet, I have still another word of warning and rebuke. "*Vineyard*" here means the religious blessings and opportunities of the Jewish people—or of any people. "*Planted a vineyard*" He not only owned it but it owed its existence to Him. "*Hedged it round*"—protected it by a stone wall or a fence of thorn. "*Wine-press*"—the receptacle in which the grapes were pressed till the juice ran through into the vat below. "*Tower*"—a place for watchmen to protect the vineyard from thieves.

V. 34.—"*Time of fruit*," etc. A certain percentage of the harvest would be theirs and the rest the owner's.

V. 35.—See Nehemiah ix., 26, for a description of how the Jews often treated the "*servants*," *i.e.*, teachers and prophets sent by God. God looked for righteousness as the fruit of all he had done for the people.

V. 37.—"*His Son*"—a veiled reference to Jesus or Messiah.

V. 40, 41.—Jesus makes the Pharisees point the moral themselves—they utter their own condemnation.

LESSON.—(1) Here are men called to the highest service—to work in God's vineyard—to work for truth, righteousness, love, and holy character. (2) Here are men called to the highest service under most favourable conditions—"hedged it round about and digged a wine-press in it and built a tower." Like people in England where all things are favourable to virtue, where there are knowledge, teachers, Bibles, churches, good examples, good books, happy homes, wise laws, etc. (3) Here are men neglecting their duties and so missing their blessings, for *neglected duties are lost opportunities*.

What an opportunity is *youth*. We lose it not only because we grow out of it into men, but whenever we miss learning the lessons and acquiring the good habits that are taught in home and school. There are men who never lose their youth because they keep their freshness and frankness and innocence all their days. How many a man has wished "O, that I could have back my youth."

What an opportunity is a *wise teacher*, with his knowledge and his inspiration. What an opportunity is *family life*, with its lessons in unselfish service. What an opportunity is *time*—time in which to work, and learn, and love, and do our duty, and serve God and man. Think of a *lost day*. A day is not lost because it has passed away: it is lost because it has not been used for good ends, because it has been idled away or misspent.

The lost days of my life until to-day,
What were they, could I see them on the street
Lie as they fell? Would they be ears of wheat
Sown once for food but trodden into clay?
Or golden coins squandered and still to pay?
Or drops of blood dabbling the guilty feet?
Or such spilt water as in dreams must cheat
The throats of men in hell, who think alway?
I do not see them here; but after death
God knows I know the faces I shall see,
Each one a murdered self, with low lost breath.
'I am thyself—what hast thou done to me?'
'And I—and I—thyself,' (lo! each one saith,)
'And thou thyself to all eternity!'—*Rosetti*.

JOSEPH WOOD.

THE CHILDREN'S PAGE.

"Fairy Mab."

Town girls do not know much about fairies, which never live in dirty streets, and are afraid of gas lamps. But country girls sometimes see fairy rings, for fairies love green meads or meadows, rippling streams, pretty flowers, leafy trees and shrubs, and the country generally. Fairy tales are pleasant to read, even though we know well enough that there are no fairies. Country people once believed very much in them in a laughing sort of way. Such country people could milk a cow, make sweet butter and bread, knew how to use both short and long needles well, knew how to cook, and to keep themselves and their houses, whether their own houses or those of their masters or mistresses, clean and tidy, and they took a pride in these things.

Fairy Mab, being queen of the fairies, of course patronises and enccurages all such accomplishments of women and girls, as we shall see.

Ben Jonson, who was, as Milton calls him, learned, was a dramatic writer contemporary with Shakespeare, and writes thus about her :—

> "*Mab*, the mistress fairy,
> That doth nightly rob the dairy,
> And can hurt or help the churning,
> As she please without discerning ;
> She that pinches country wenches
> If they rub not clean their benches,
> But if so they chance to feast her
> In their shoe she drops a tester."

If the dairy were robbed, it was all very well to say that Mab did it. Probably she d d, but it was not Queen Mab. A queen would never rob anything or anybody. Every girl should be a queen so far. Perhaps it was a favourite cat. If the butter did not come at the right time in the churn, it was a sort of relief to say that the fairies hindered it. One is pleased to see that Mab liked clean benches. Neat, shining, well-scrubbed floors and benches are so much more worthy of any queen than dirty or torn carpets.

The rewards for keeping things clean and sweet are the pleasure of looking at them, the healthiness of the people who live among them, and the happiness of all around. Queen Mab used, you see, to drop sixpences (testers) about privately, in proof of her pleasure.

Robert Herrick, who was contemporary with Jonson, teaches you how to please the Queen of the Fairies. To please anyone whom it is our duty to please is excellent. But to please a queen—

> "If ye will with Mab find grace,
> Set each platter in its place,
> Rake the fire up and get
> Water in, ere sun be set,
> Sweep your house ; who doth not so,
> Mab will pinch her by the toe."

It is a pity she does not pinch some people harder. For some girls think it beneath them to set the table—we may be sure they cannot do it well ; or mend the fire ; or fetch the coals ; or get in the water from a sweet stream or pure well ; or sweep the house. All these are girls' work, good work, and proper for them to do. It is work that they never need be ashamed of, except they cannot do it well, and then they ought to be very much ashamed indeed. It is work that will make every girl a fairy Queen Mab.

The Sparrow.

> Glad to see you, little bird,
> 'Twas your pretty *chirp* I heard ;
> What did you intend to say ?
> "Give me something this cold day.
>
> That I will, and plenty too ;
> All these crumbs I've saved for you.
> Don't be frightened,—here's a treat,
> I will wait and see you eat.
>
> Frost and snow have made you bold ;
> I'll not hurt you, though I'm told
> There are many reasons why
> Every sparrow ought to die.
>
> Thomas says you steal his wheat,
> John complains his plums you eat,
> Choose the ripest for your share,
> Never asking whose they are.
>
> Shocking tales I hear of you ;
> Chirp, and tell me, are they true ?
> Robbing all the summer long ;
> Don't you think it very wrong ?
>
> Yet you seem an honest bird,
> Don't be vexed at what I've heard ;
> Now, no grapes or plums you eat ;
> Now, you cannot steal the wheat.
>
> So I will not try to know
> What you did so long ago ;
> There's your breakfast, eat away,
> Come and see me every day.

Herrick's "Grace for a Child."

> Here a little child I stand,
> Holding up my either hand ;
> Cold as paddock frogs though they be
> Yet I lift them Lord to Thee,
> For a benison to fall
> On our meat, and on us all

News from the Field.

PROFESSOR CARPENTER AT BIRMINGHAM.—Before this number reaches our readers Professor J. Estlin Carpenter, M.A., of Manchester College, Oxford, will have given the first of eight lectures on "The first three gospels, their growth and meaning." The presence of our College at Oxford suggested to some of our Birmingham friends the possibility of securing from time to time the services of one of the professors to lecture in the capital of the Midlands on subjects of interest to students and inquirers. Such lectures would serve to bring the College into contact with many friends, and might be the means of helping others who are anxious to know what the newest knowledge and the highest criticism have to say on the great questions of theology. Professor Carpenter met the idea with enthusiasm, and in obtaining his services to lecture on a subject about which he is a great and recognised authority, the local committee have made an admirable start. The lectures are to be given at 5 o'clock on the Wednesday afternoons in February and March in the Lecture Hall of the Temperance Institute, Corporation Street, Birmingham. Tickets for the course 5s. each, can be obtained at any of our chapels, and of Miss Dawson, 87, Hagley Road. Admission to single lectures, one shilling.

MANCHESTER COLLEGE PULPIT.—We are glad to announce that arrangements have been made to publish in the *Seed Sower* sermons preached by distinguished men in Manchester College Chapel, Oxford. The first sermon, under the heading "Manchester College Pulpit," will be issued next month, and will be by the Rev. Professor Carpenter, M.A.

BIRMINGHAM (*Church of the Saviour*).—The Rev. J. C. Street has just secured the services for twelve months of the Rev. Edward W. Lummis, B.A. (Oxon), as his assistant in the active missionary work in connection with the Church of the Saviour. Mr. Lummis was educated at King Edward's High School, Birmingham, where he gained several scholarships and an exhibition to Worcester College, Oxford. In 1887 he was placed in the second class in Honour Classical Moderations, and in 1889 he took his B.A. degree. Since that time he has taught in various public schools, and, subsequently, preliminary to Holy Orders, he took a second class in the Universities Theological Examination. He was ordained to the office of deacon by the present Bishop of Durham, and became curate at Winlaton-on-Tyne. This curacy he resigned, because his theology had outgrown that of the Established Church, on December 8th, 1894, and wrote on the 16th to resign his appointment. He bears a high character, and has evidently a distinguished career before him in the Free Churches.

BIRMINGHAM (*Hollywood*).—Avery pleasant evening was spent at Kingswood School on Tuesday, the 22nd, when Messrs. Townley and Heaviside kindly provided a lantern entertainment, with musical intervals. Miss Townley (piano) and Messrs. Bourne and Chawner (first and second violins) added greatly to the enjoyment by their excellent playing, while Mr. Baker fairly captivated the audience by his singing. The room was well filled. The proceeds will go towards the fund for the purchase of a new harmonium for the school.

BIRMINGHAM (*Hurst Street Domestic Mission*).—The marking for the present year, in connection with the Sunday Morning Adult Class, conducted by Mr. W. J. Clarke, began on Sunday, the 20th January. Although the weather was exceedingly unfavourable, the attendance was the largest yet reached, upwards of 350 being present. Mr. J. Smith, the late Secretary of the class, read a statement, showing that upwards of £130 had been raised by the class members during the past year, a sum sufficient to discharge all liabilities, and to leave a fair balance in hand. The average attendance of the class is now over 300. During the recent Christmas and New Year season, a very considerable amount of philanthropic work has been done through the agency of the mission. The annual distribution among the deserving poor took place on Christmas Eve, nearly 200 recipients receiving gifts, consisting of meal, coal, groceries, garments, and, in special cases, money, beef, and wine extract, and other nourishments. On Christmas morning a breakfast was given to nearly 600 poor children. On New Year's Day the annual dinner was given to aged poor men and women, upwards of 260 being present. None of the aged guests were under 60; several were over 80, and one or two over 90. In addition to this, since the 19th of December, nearly 900 children have been clothed under the police-aided scheme for clothing the destitute children of the city; while, since the same date, relief has been given in upwards of 720 instances, in connection with the Military Veterans' Movement. Both of these are independent associations, but the whole of the work connected with the clothing of the children, and the relief of the veterans is done by the staff of the missions. Tea meetings, social gatherings, etc., were held in connection with the Junior Sunday Schools, the Sunday Morning Adult Class, The Teachers' Society, Mothers' Meeting, and the Band of Hope, all of them being well attended, and passing off in a thoroughly satisfactory manner. Excellently attended Christmas and New Year services were also held in the chapel. The ordinary attendance in the morning is now so large that the question of erecting galleries round the walls, in order to provide further accommodation, is being seriously spoken of. Another very encouraging feature in connection with the work of the mission is the weekly mother's meeting. The attendance now never falls below 200, oftener than not nearly reaching 300. How highly those who attend value this one pleasant break in the monotony of their ordinary every day existence, is shown by the fact that the hall is nearly always filled by the hour announced for beginning, a considerable number as a rule being present a full hour before that time.

BIRMINGHAM (*The Old Meeting Church.*—The annual meeting of the congregation was held in the schoolroom on Monday evening, January 21st, when, notwithstanding the severity of the weather, there was a good attendance of members and friends. Mr. J. H. Forrester (senior warden) occupied the chair, and amongst those present were the Rev. Joseph Wood, Lieutenant-General Phelps, Messrs. R. Peyton, E. L. Tyndall, C. Harding, E. Martineau, E. Townley, A. Scruton, J. M. Madden. Allen Edwards (treasurer), A. Browett, J. Wand, F. S. Goode, and a large number of ladies. The reports and accounts of the church Sunday schools, domestic mission, benevolent society, social union, guild, &c., all showed a healthy condition, and told of much good work done during the year. There are more than 600 scholars in the schools, and the neighbourhood of the church is kept under constant visitation by the missionary. In response to a vote of thanks, the Rev. J. Wood said occasions like these compelled them to face their position, and ask what did a church like the Old Meeting stand for? Did that which differentiated them from other churches justify their existence? No doubt a great deal of their work was exactly the same as in other churches—namely, to kindle the flame of religious devotion, to reinforce the sense of duty, to strengthen the will in the choice between good and evil, to turn the thoughts to whatever is pure, honest, lovely, and of good report, to stimulate Christian activity, to summon men and women to holy living and brave dying, to labour for the setting up of God's kingdom in the world. It was their mission, as that of any other church, to minister to the religious life of its members, to succour the needy, to save the lost, to teach the ignorant, to comfort the stricken, to open blind eyes, to feed the hungry and cheer the faint. But that was not all. It was the special mission of a church like theirs to witness for a faith that should be in harmony with the newest knowledge, the facts of science, and the demands of reason. In a town like Birmingham there were thousands of people who had drifted away from their old moorings and were tossing on a sea of doubts and questions. They found that the new knowledge did not square with the old creeds. How large a proportion of the educated classes, professional men, teachers, and others, were alienated, not from religion, but from its organised expression in churches and creeds. Men who read Carlyle and Darwin, Browning and Matthew Arnold, Huxley and Seeley, to say nothing of such popular works as "Robert Elsmere," found it more and more difficult to believe in the old philosophy and the Augustinian theology. It was the duty of a church like theirs to show that religion was still reasonable, to meet men only on their own ground, and to offer a harbour of refuge for storm-tossed souls, to minister to the religious wants of souls touched with the intellectual fervour and unrest of the present time. It was theirs to stand as the deliverers from scepticism on the one hand, and from superstition on the other, and to meet the demand for a faith that should satisfy the intellect as well as the heart, that should be reasonable and credible to men who had for ever renounced a mediæval philosophy and creed. Their mission was specially directed to the seekers, the doubters, the people whom the other churches could not and did not retain. A vote of thanks to the chairman concluded a most interesting meeting.

LYE.—Three subscriptions have been received towards our school extension fund during the past month, viz.:—Mrs. Gee, Atherstone, 10s.; Mr. Henry Lupton, Leeds, £1; Mr. G. H. Kenrick, Birmingham, £5; total amount subscribed, £204 3s. 6d. It may be mentioned also that a grant of £20 has been promised conditionally by the British and Foreign Unitarian Association.—The Christmas entertainment was held in the Temperance Hall, and was well attended.—On December 11th, our minister organised a concert for the benefit of the Corngreaves' men here. This too was a great success, £7 or £8 being realised in all.

SHREWSBURY.—The usual Christmas party of the scholars and their teachers of the High Street Church Sunday School, was held on December 26th, 1894, when they partook of tea together, to the number of about 80; after which a programme of songs, recitations, and Mr. Hawkes' play of "The Babes in the Wood," was gone through in a very creditable and enjoyable manner. On January 17th, 1895, the annual New Year's social gathering of the congregation and their friends was held. An excellent tea was provided, and during the evening organ recitals, speeches, songs, and recitations were given, and a most pleasant evening was spent.

WALSALL.—Our minister, the Rev. Peter Dean, has just been elected on the Walsall School Board for the third time. There were twenty candidates nominated for the eleven seats, but by the good offices of the Mayor of the town a contest was avoided. Previously, Mr. Dean has been one of the "Noncomformists" on the Board, but as this time they asked that each of their candidates should say he was in favour of religious teaching in the Board Schools, he refused to join them, and has been elected as the only "Independent"

WHITCHURCH.—The preacher at the fourth special monthly service in the Church of the Saviour last week was the Rev. Wm. E. Addis, M.A., whose sermon on "Jesus Christ, the Way, the Truth, and the Life," was listened to by a congregation which had to brave the rigours of an arctic night, and travel far over snow-bound roads. The collection more than covered expenses. The next service will be taken by the Rev. Brooke Herford, D.D. In every way so far this experiment of bringing our leaders to an isolated church has more than fulfilled our expectations. Friends from orthodox churches have come to all the services

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WOLVERHAMPTON.—We are rejoiced to hear that Mr. Crook's serious illness has taken a favourable turn, and that he has now been removed to the milder air of Clevedon. The pulpit at Wolverhampton is being kindly supplied by the ministers of the district.